

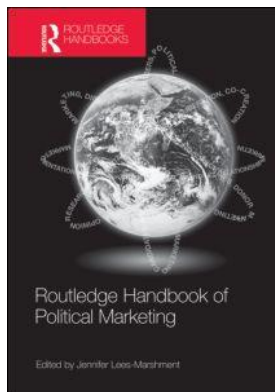
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### **Political parties and direct marketing**

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# Political parties and direct marketing

## Connecting voters and candidates more effectively

*Peter N. Ubertaccio*

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### **The topic: parties and direct marketing**

At the end of the 20th century political parties worldwide followed a trend towards the centralization of campaigning. In the US, for example, political parties centralized certain fundraising and marketing efforts in their Washington, DC arms – the two national committees and their counterparts for House and Senate candidates – even as the local organizations that once served to connect citizens to government became less important to voters and to nominations. At the same time, political campaigning used the more sophisticated tools of political marketing, particularly direct marketing. Direct marketing, a pioneering tactic of international companies such as Amway and Tupperware, micro-targeting and social networking replaced the tactics of the old party system and, when aggressively used in political campaigns, hold out the promise for a return to locally active organizations. In the US, they were first seen in the Republican congressional campaign of 2002 and the Bush re-election campaign of 2004, which demonstrated that highly effective micro-targeting of voters combined with direct marketing strategies could find more and turn out a greater number of partisan voters. The same principals of direct marketing were also used by Vermont governor Howard Dean during the 2004 Democratic primaries, and then to form the social media strategy of the Obama for President campaign.

Nevertheless, despite the way that the Obama campaign was said to mobilize grassroots campaigning, as a new round of campaigns for Congress and president get underway in advance of the 2012 national elections, the US party system remains largely candidate-centered, with fundraising and messaging centralized in Washington. This chapter will both discuss the nature of direct marketing and its use by parties so far, as well as debating its potential to reconnect voters to local party organizations and campaigns, making the conversations among citizens and between them and candidates much more vibrant.

## Previous research on party decline and direct marketing

Political marketing research has commented on the centralizing effect of marketing (Lees 2005) and the potential downgrading of party members (Lilleker 2005; Pettitt 2009), as well as the transformation of party organization (Newman 1994). Lilleker (2005) argued that the UK's New Labour lost volunteers because its promises became more oriented 'towards the middle-class swingers, rejecting working-class based politics' (Lilleker 2005: 573). Political marketing can change internal power: as strategists together with the leadership determine policy direction in relation to market intelligence, this 'can leave ordinary members feeling alienated' (ibid.) if they see no response to their demands within that product development process. In the UK Labour case, Lilleker (2005) found that members felt that there had been a lack of consultation and they had been disenfranchised. In other sub-fields of political science, such as parties, there is an extensive literature on the decline of the US party system. Indeed, parties have always found their centralizing thrust to be difficult in the US system of separation of powers, federalism, and checks and balances, all part of what historian Richard Hofstadter called the 'Constitution-Against-Parties' (Hofstadter 1969). From the zenith of their power and influence in US politics in the late 19th century, parties as organizations have been in relative decline, having lost control of the ability to bestow party nominations and commanding allegiance among fewer and fewer voters. Progressive and New Deal era reforms undercut party solidarity and weakened party organizations as the US executive became the centralizing feature of US politics whereas parties in the early 2000s are in a 'late state of a century-long decline' (Shafer 2003). 'As the presidency evolved into a ubiquitous institution', noted Sidney Milkis, 'it preempted party leaders in many of their limited but significant tasks: linking the president to interest groups, staffing the executive department, policy development, and ... campaign support' (Milkis 1999: 100). These reforms combined with what David Broder views as subsequent 'years of neglect' turned parties into little more than fundraising mechanisms for a candidate-centered polity (Broder 1971). In the 21st century, roughly 30 percent of the US electorate registers as 'independent' or 'no party'. Among the reasons for this de-alignment of voters is the decline of party organizations.

The decline of patronage, a result of civil service reforms and a more professionalized governmental work force, deprived the traditional system of its main source of support. Local party organizations, bereft of financial support and access to jobs, declined as well. As a result, party organizations became nationalized as the affairs of our politics became nationalized in scope during the mid-20th century. However, that greater outlook did not result in greater party power. Rather, parties served as devices for candidates to use to raise funds, hone their message and learn strategy. Their link to local organizations and citizens atrophied. Milkis reminds us that parties have always been a bulwark of local democratic forces and that the administrative aggrandizement and growth of presidential power in the mid-20th century further reduced the role of party organizations in American life. Despite frequent calls for a revival of strong parties, 'such calls for fundamental reorganization of political parties and their relationship to politics and government have fallen on deaf ears' (Milkis 1999: 185).

Parties, under the weight of national administrative power, strict campaign finance laws and primary elections to choose nominees, adapted. Newman (1994) details the transition of an older 'party concept' of campaign strategy where patronage and a 'lifetime of party affiliation' play a crucial role in a candidate's success, to a 'marketing concept' of strategy. In the latter, 'strategy originates from the voter and begins by breaking down the electorate into distinct and separate segments of voters'. Using the techniques of political consultants, once segmentation has been achieved, 'the candidate creates an image for himself and uses that to position himself.

The strategy is then executed through information channels based on the results of marketing research and polling' (Newman 1994: 38).

As for direct marketing, O'Shaughnessy and Peele (1985) is one of the few studies in political marketing, and this focuses on the use of direct mail in the 1980s. They note how it was used by previous presidential candidates including Barry Goldwater, George McGovern, Jimmy Carter, Edward Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, and argue that telemarketing works well in conjunction with a mailing or to approach lapsed supporters or donors: '*Americans for Reagan* in conjunction with a mailing raised seven million dollars by telephone in 1980' (O'Shaughnessy and Peele 1985: 115–16). This early study of direct mail noted the complexity of such tactics relative to party strength. On the one hand, the use of direct mail 'represents a way of mobilizing mass allegiance' but it does so in a 'personal way' and it is also a 'catalyst for political fragmentation in the United States, as maverick pressure groups innocent of party loyalty have employed it to carve out a national constituency' (O'Shaughnessy and Peele 1985: 119). Despite this, there is little doubt that advances in the targeting of direct mail were indispensable to parties and campaigns beginning in the 1970s. In the pre-electronic era, direct mail allowed party operatives to tap into a stream of new voters for electoral and financial support. Direct mail was conceived as a political mechanism less to benefit the Republican Party and more to galvanize a growing number of conservative activists around the country in the late 1970s who then successfully took over the party machinery. Pioneered by Richard Viguerie in the 1978 congressional election, direct mail was credited with assisting conservatives in 30 congressional races win an election, including future speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia. The Republican National Committee (RNC) adopted the technique and aggressively used direct mail in an attempt to reach parity with Democratic lists of voters. It also allowed the national party to bypass state and local actors and to reinforce a political message directly to Republican and Republican-leaning voters. The appeal of direct mail to campaigns is that it can be targeted to distinct groups of voters by purchasing voter lists; it can allow campaigns to 'create a running narrative' with voters; and it provides a wonderful volunteer opportunity, infusing campaign organizations with energy (Shea and Burton 2006: 190).

Direct marketing requires a much greater level of active participation in the campaign or party apparatus. Also called multi-level or relationship marketing, direct marketing was pioneered as a business model that distributes products and services by using a process through which independent agents market to families and friends. Similar to a pyramid structure, the independent agents create their own sales force, called a downline, by recruiting others into the business. Profits earned reflect the sales activity of the sales force, with downline agents earning profits for themselves and their upline supervisors. All levels of the model earn greater profits based on the size and the activity of their team. Direct marketing firms rely on person-to-person advocacy, using personal networks of family, friends, churches and civic organizations as their recruiting ground.

However, in politics, direct mail as a campaign tactic opened the window to direct marketing by political parties since it allowed party and candidate organizations to move into a more direct relationship with voters. Of course, tactics that emphasize personal contact between political organizations and voters are not entirely new. During the heyday of party strength, personal tactics were part and parcel of precinct-by-precinct strength, but as direct marketing emerged in the 21st century as a multi-billion dollar, technologically savvy enterprise, major candidates for office took greater notice. The advent of social networking technology made the tactics easier to follow, though not all who try succeed, as the McCain campaign's failure to successfully navigate the new contours demonstrates. Obama's campaign beat McCain on every single measurement of online activity and at coordinating all of those who used social networking to

engage the candidate. However, social networking is only one aspect of direct marketing and, as the unhappy experience of Howard Dean demonstrates, does not supplant get out the vote efforts. Still, it is the tactic du jour for campaigns for the same reason direct marketing firms continue to prosper: An analysis in the alternative online magazine *EnergyGrid* declared:

The reason why MLM [multi-level marketing] can work so well is that people are much more likely to fall for a sales pitch from a friend or relative, or a stranger in a home setting, than they are from a stranger in a shop or market, or an advert in a paper, magazine or on the Internet.

*(Energy Grid 2004)*

Here network marketing is quite similar to political marketing in terms of citizen participation in political parties. Paul Whiteley (2011) notes, in his research on the decline of political parties, that 'Membership and activism are stimulated by interest in politics, discussion of politics with friends and by civic norms'. An early research note on social pressure notes that 'social pressure messages are roughly an order of magnitude more influential than conventional partisan or nonpartisan appeals' (Davenport *et al.* 2010: 423). The authors define social pressure messages at those 'designed to encourage adherence to social norms by reminding people of their obligation to abide by these norms and indicating that compliance will be monitored and perhaps disclosed to others' (*ibid.*). Although political marketing has not focused on this development, this chapter will attempt to address that gap, and draw on literature within campaign and election studies, media sources and the accounts provided by practitioners during the key campaigns of 2000, 2004 and 2008 that saw a steady progression of direct and network marketing tactics.

### **New research: direct marketing by the Bush Republicans and beyond**

When Republican President George W. Bush won re-election in 2004 over Massachusetts Democratic Senator John F. Kerry, he did so despite losing independent voters 49 percent to 48 percent, reversing a modern trend in presidential elections where independent voters decide who wins the White House. With both Bush and Kerry winning high percentages of strong partisan identifiers and Kerry winning the independent vote, it was an increase in Republican identifying voters who provided the margin of victory for Bush. The Republicans found and turned out more Republican voters. Abramson *et al.* note that:

with fewer independents to woo and such an even balance, the battle becomes a contest for the remaining independents and the weak partisans, as well as one of 'strengthening the base', that is, appealing to those already predisposed to be supporters to motivate them to turn out.

*(Abramson et al. 2007: 216)*

In this environment, the Republicans relied on their growing fascination with direct marketing firms.

The gold standard of American network marketing companies is Amway. Founded in 1959 it is a privately held company that sells home health goods and a variety of household goods. By 2010 it had sales in excess of \$9 billion in the US and it has expanded globally to all corners of the world. Its growth in sales is not due to traditional marketing. Amway bypasses the typical media environment by relying on independent business owners (IBOs) who market Amway's vast array of products directly to potential customers, beginning with their families and friends.

Success is achieved in part as IBOs convince their ‘networks’ to purchase products they already use in their households from the Amway distributor. IBOs also recruit and train other people, again drawing on their network of connections. The process repeats itself over and over again as pyramid-shaped structures grow and grow, all sparked by personal connections and influence.

Amway’s success and its appeal to legions of supporters brought it a good deal of political attention. Amway formally met politics during the 2002 and 2004 Republican efforts to increase their majorities in Congress and ensure the re-election of George W. Bush. Voter segmentation and data processing have allowed campaigns and political parties to micro-target populations of voters with direct mail and, increasingly, direct outreach. This was achieved most effectively by the Republican Party under Bush and Karl Rove. Their near defeat in 2000 stimulated Rove’s interest in these emerging tactics. Caught off-guard when his estimates for a 2000 victory hinged on turnout of about 20 million evangelical voters, about 4 million more than actually turned out for Bush, Rove set about recasting GOP (Republican Party) strategy. Rove and staffers at the Republican National Committee instituted the ‘72-Hour Task Force’ which became the ‘72-Hour Project’ designed to increase the number of Republican voters by using personal campaign teams to contact GOP-leaning voters within 72 hours of the polls opening on election day. In its implementation, the 72-Hour Task Force drew heavily on network marketing techniques to create a new organizational level of activism, the grassroots network, complete with ‘upline’ and ‘downline’ participants, who could more effectively reach prospective voters and increase turnout.

### *Mentoring young partisans*

Dan Balz described these efforts as ‘a throwback that both Democrats and Republicans have rediscovered as an antidote to television ads’ (Balz 2003). However, this ‘throwback’ was applied with modern marketing techniques and direct marketing finesse. For example, the RNC ran experiments to test the claims of network marketing firms. According to Garance Franke-Ruta and Harold Meyerson, in 2002, as an experiment, ‘four volunteers were pitted against a professional telemarketing firm, each with an identical script and separate lists of voter names. The four volunteers got almost 5 percent more people to the polls than the pros’ (Franke-Ruta and Meyerson 2004). As Ken Mehlman noted:

The most important thing you can do in politics is give someone a personal contact from a credible source. Not just a personal contact from a paid person on the ground, but someone in their church, their gun club or the PTA.

*(Kondracke 2004)*

Armed with this data, volunteers were recruited by national, state, local and collegiate party organizations at rallies, meetings and, increasingly, through the internet. The new downline recruits were assigned to precincts in which they would network and would find mentors in more experienced campaign hands. All such volunteers reported to an RNC marshal who would organize them into small groups with mobile phones given to each one. The groups were assigned a specific task: to staff phone banks, canvass select precincts, or conduct campaign visibility. The training involved in this approach was rigorous, often occurring over a period of months and often targeted at specific goals of expanding the GOP coalition and registering new voters. Incentives were employed as well, such as receiving a signed picture of the president or tickets to major Bush re-election events.

The analysis of the network marketing tactics in the 2004 Ohio presidential campaign by Matt Bai illustrates the degree to which parties have mastered the techniques of network marketing. Campaign manager Ken Mehlman was one of the preeminent architects of what was referred to as 'the Plan'. Local parties and campaign organizations were to work in close consultation with the national party and Bush campaign to set goals for the volunteer aspect of the reelection effort. Said Mehlman:

The lessons of reality TV are that people are into participatory activities ... They want to have influence over a decision that's made. They don't want to just sit and passively absorb. They want to be involved, and a political program ought to recognize that.

*(Bai 2004)*

The process of mobilizing voters in the 2004 Republican campaign was left in the hands of local volunteers, Bush Team Leaders. Bai was introduced to Todd Hanks, the Delaware County, Ohio Bush campaign chair. Bush won Delaware County with 66 percent of the vote in 2000, so it was a solidly Republican county where Bush needed to win big to offset expected Democratic gains in the urban areas of the state. In order to keep Ohio in the GOP fold, Hanks was committed to maximizing the Republican vote. As a downline participant, Todd Hanks was recruited and kept in the organization in the same way that someone is recruited and kept in a network marketing company. Despite his strong political preference for Bush, 'Hanks readily admitted that his ultimate goal is to rise through the ranks of local and even state politics', wrote Bai. 'For Hanks, the Bush campaign offers a chance to recruit a "downline" of new volunteers who will, ideally, remain loyal to him in future campaigns – including his own' (Eggen 2004). The old-style, patronage-based machine has thus been replaced by the pyramid goals of network marketing organizations.

### *The Bush brand*

To provide a greater stimulus to their local campaign organizations, Bush's consultants developed an identifiable Bush brand. The branding was in part a product of Bush's unique moment in office during the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the ensuing rally of popular support around his presidency. Bush's rocky relationship with the American people, a lingering status due to the unusual circumstances of his election, ended with the terrorist attacks. The branding centered on issues of leadership, security and strength. W, the president's middle initial, was emblazoned on coffee mugs, cufflinks and apparel. Having a 'product' to 'sell' is, of course, critical to any marketing technique, and it is especially so for network marketing where the personal contact of the 'sales force' is on the line.

When Bush entered the congressional elections of 2002, he became the best upline salesman for the 'brand'. More than most recent presidents, he was relentless in these efforts, visiting 40 states and over 100 congressional districts on behalf of Republican candidates in 2002. While nearly all modern presidents engage the people during congressional elections, few dive as deeply as Bush. No president since Franklin Roosevelt in 1934 presided over a party that gained seats in their first midterm election.

The success of the 2002 campaign provided the evidence that Republican Party leaders needed of the effectiveness of not only Bush as party leader but also the network marketing of parties. Indeed, by 2004 Bush's efforts as party leader bore fruit because of the organizational network marketing techniques on the ground. According to Bush's chief strategist, Matthew

Dowd, 'We had good candidates, but also, we had such good tactics. But having a president with a 60 percent, 59 percent job approval helps' (Dowd 2005).

The GOP 'plan' in 2004 developed grassroots organizations in all 50 states, but with special emphasis on 16 'battleground states'. The top of the upline managers were at the campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, followed by regional coordinators and state-level coordinators; these three levels were all paid campaign operatives. Beneath the state-level coordinators was the downline – county, city and precinct officials – who were volunteers. By election day, this cooperative operation had more than 1 million volunteers nationwide, a party machine for the modern era.

The upline managers set specific goals for the downline participants, including recruiting volunteers, organizing campaign events, registering and contacting voters. Participants at every level of the organization were held accountable for meeting these goals. Just as importantly, the Bush campaign provided highly targeted messages for the volunteers to deliver. This 'micro-targeting' was produced by extensive and sophisticated research. As Dan Balz and Mike Allen reported:

Once those people were identified, the RNC sought to register them, and the campaign used phone calls, mail and front-porch visits – all with a message emphasizing the issues about which they cared most – to encourage them to turn out for Bush.

*(Balz and Allen 2004)*

The net result of the network marketing techniques was greater attention to the grassroots and more viral activity among potential Bush voters in 2004. According to state senator Jane Earl of Erie County, Pennsylvania, compared with past campaigns, 'There are more campaign people around, more coordination, more ground troops and grass-roots organizing' (Raum 2004).

After the 2004 election, RNC chair Ed Gillespie emailed his followers with the good news:

1.2 million volunteers made over 15 million contacts, knocking on doors and making calls in the 72 hours before the polls closed. 7.2 million e-activists were contacting their family, friends, and co-workers. The RNC registered 3.4 million new voters, enlisted 1.4 million Team Leaders, and contacted – on a person to person basis – 30 million Americans in the months leading up to and including Election Day, and in the final 72 hours we met 129 percent of our door-knocking goal; and met 120 percent of our phone-calling goal.

*(East 2004)*

### *Beyond 2004*

Direct marketing of campaigns was front and center in the Dean campaign of 2004 and the Obama campaign of 2008. Dean's was the first campaign to truly fashion the internet as a political force to be reckoned with. The increasingly unpopular war in Iraq fed Dean's insurgent campaign and provided it with a unifying message. His use of MeetUp and BlogforAmerica.com encouraged a small group of supporters to reach out to their networks. Dean began 2003 with a few hundred supporters on MeetUp, only to increase that number to 140,000 in the fall. He raised \$15 million in contributions using these connections and innovative internet fundraising (Wolfe 2004). Going into the primary season, Dean had become the Democratic frontrunner due largely to his campaign's embrace of emerging technology and the direct marketing capabilities of



social sites such as MeetUp. However, while the Bush campaign of 2004 would emerge successful for using direct marketing to identify new voters and get them to the polls, the Dean primary campaign faltered. His internet fundraising, MeetUp number and fundraising prowess could not motivate enough voters to get out the vote and he stumbled badly in early voting.

Two years after the Democrats failed to deny Bush re-election, the president's public standing was so low and sustained that Democrats came to appreciate how the direct marketing efforts advanced by their opponents and the effective use of the internet demonstrated by Howard Dean could be harnessed to help achieve victory at the ballot box.

Initially, the match-up between Democratic motivation and Republican direct marketing tactics was indeed an intriguing one. Robin Toner noted the continuing relevance of the 72-Hour Project to the Republicans in 2006, as well as the supreme confidence placed in it by many of the party's elite. Indeed, in an election where a sour national mood driven by an unpopular war in Iraq and a litany of high-profile Republican scandals was mounting against the GOP, many saw their voter outreach program as the biggest reason to remain hopeful going into the election. The ability of Republican strategists to target nearly every potential Republican voter through comprehensive computer databases and micro-targeting, and deliver an individually tailored message was considered an adequate compensation for a relatively unmotivated base. Party strategist Tom Cole described the 2006 midterms as 'a race where professionalism has to make up for enthusiasm' (Toner 2006).

However, the success of GOP efforts in 2004 faced a much more difficult environment in 2006. Still, they stuck to the same strategy that had helped them win the presidency in 2004 with a goal of adding roughly 2.2 million downline supporters to augment their 170 million member-strong Voter Vault database. On top of this were efforts to register over 400,000 new votes and recruit 2,000 more get out the vote coordinators along with thousands of precinct captains and roughly 100,000 new volunteers (Ambinder 2006). The GOP had also planned to invest roughly \$26 million in its grassroots get out the vote efforts. The mechanics in terms of manpower and financial backing were in place to run a GOP mobilization campaign that was at the very least on par with the once vastly superior Republican efforts fielded in the previous two elections.

Democrats matched the Republican efforts and the most critical point of departure for them was to equalize Republican superiority with financial resources. According to the *National Journal*, the congressional and senate campaign chairs, Rahm Emmanuel and Charles Schumer, placed the 72-Hour Project firmly within their gaze and incorporated its capabilities into their campaign strategies over a year before the 2006 midterm elections. While dissension between Emanuel and Schumer and Howard Dean was well documented, Democratic strategic leadership was eventually able to coalesce around the need for a better-funded get out the vote effort. Dean, subsequently elected chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) after his presidential aspirations ended, loudly advocated a 50-state strategy whereas the congressional campaign chairs preferred a more targeted effort in states and districts where Democrats were truly competitive.

### *Voter outreach and targeting*

Despite the tactical disagreements, the increased commitment to voter outreach helped open the possibility that combined Democratic efforts would actually be able to exceed those of their Republican rivals. This was aided by an assertive fundraising campaign on the part of Democrats which allowed them to enter into the final weeks of the campaign with nearly as much money as the Republicans. Prior to the election, the totals projected from the Democratic Senatorial

Campaign Committee (DSCC), the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), and the DNC were expected to eclipse the \$30 million budgeted for the 72-Hour Project. The DNC alone had budgeted around \$12 million for voter outreach programs, setting a new high for a midterm election (Ambinder 2006). Increased funds for voter turnout helped the Democrats to bridge a crucial gap in micro-targeting in the 2006 election. Stephen Weismann at the non-partisan Campaign Finance Institute, noted that ‘The big trend is micro-targeting, and that was used by Democratic-oriented groups to supplement their knowledge ... they were trying to get more precise. Republicans were in this area first, but Democrats are catching up’ (Vaida and Munro 2006).

Micro-targeting and the use of sophisticated internet databases were a crucial facet of the successful implementation of multi-level marketing strategies by the Republican Party in 2002 and 2004. In fact, the 72-Hour Project was essentially fueled by the information contained within the Republican database or the ‘Voter Vault’. A massive collection of voter data, Voter Vault contained a wealth of information pertaining to individual voter biases, habits and points of view, and was accessible to GOP volunteers and organizers as well as the party leadership. As such, Voter Vault existed simultaneously as a means to monitor and organize party activity within the 72-Hour Project framework as well as a source of practically limitless data on potential voters. This voter data allowed the Republican Party to tailor specific messages to meet the preferences and persuasions of potential voters as well as deliver them with precision.

Obama’s victory in 2008 has been remarked on at length and his successful use of the internet obscures the important permanence of the Bush strategies of 2002 and 2004. David Carr noted that:

Like a lot of Web innovators, the Obama campaign did not invent anything completely new. Instead, by bolting together social networking applications under the banner of a movement, they created an unforeseen force to raise money, organize locally, fight smear campaigns and get out the vote that helped them topple the Clinton machine and then John McCain and the Republicans.

(Carr 2008)

Obama had 290 percent more supporters on Facebook than John McCain, for example. Beyond the numbers, though, was the aggressive get out the vote mechanism. The characterization of the McCain campaign’s ground effort is startling not just for its comparison to Obama’s highly coordinated, energized effort, but also for the comparison to the Bush effort of 2004, noted for its high level of network activity. According to Sean Quinn, who visited both campaigns in the swing state of Missouri, ‘*We’ve observed no comparison between these ground campaigns.* To begin with, there’s a 4–1 ratio of offices in most states. We walk into McCain offices to find them closed, empty, one person, two people, sometimes three people making calls’ (Quinn 2008).

Quinn went on to add, ‘The McCain offices are also calm, sedate. Little movement. No hustle. In the Obama offices, it’s a whirlwind. People move. It’s a dynamic bustle’ (Quinn 2008). The contrast to the Bush efforts could not have been more striking.

The McCain campaign’s failure to use advances in social media, its failure to integrate its web content and get out the vote mechanisms, and its relative disregard for the direct marketing tactics employed by the Bush Republicans are symptomatic of the candidate-centered, executive-dominated system of US elections. Despite centralization of certain key functions in their DC headquarters, political party organizations remain secondary to candidate influence and intra-party competition.

In sum, we can see that the Republican application of network marketing techniques to party organization paid off with party victories in 2002 and 2004. Significantly, however, Republican Party affiliation in the electorate has not changed since the 2000 election of Bush, hovering around 31 percent of the population, with Democrats declining from 36 percent to 33 percent (Harris Interactive 2005). It was also used beyond 2005 and direct marketing increased their share of the vote for the winning parties in 2004 and 2008. It is thus a significant tool for political parties and political campaigns but has also yet to become fully institutionalized.

### Advice for practitioners

Direct marketing is to contemporary campaigns what direct mail was in the late 1970s: ‘its role should interlock with other mediums so that the various elements of a campaign are mutually reinforcing’ (O’Shaughnessy and Peele 1985: 122). The integration of marketing tactics needs to be adapted to the direct marketing environment perfected by the Bush, Dean and Obama campaigns. There are five key ways to effectively integrate direct marketing in modern political campaigns:

- Begin with voter targeting. In a political environment such as the US, where party membership is fluid and not formalized, where de-alignment has increased the numbers of independent voters, and where party identifiers of the two main parties are relatively equal, targeting sympathizers with a history of voting is a key first step in direct marketing of politics. If, as Davenport *et al.* (2010: 425) suggest, ‘social pressure interventions have persistent effects’, then finding likely voters to which one can directly market a candidate or party is vitally important.
- View the online campaign site as a portal for personal contact. Campaign consultants scrambled in the 1990s to develop websites to provide information to voters, but online presence is not an effective get out the vote mechanism unless thoroughly integrated into a direct marketing experience. Clicks on websites need to be evaluated and monitored for market integration: is the campaign connecting with the right prospective volunteers and voters and from where are these clicks emerging – Google searches, social media, etc. This information is important to campaigns looking to tailor a message to specific audiences.
- Social media integration. A modern campaign must take care to create a social media universe that does not dilute its message. A modern campaign must have a YouTube station, Facebook and Twitter accounts. It must be aware of emerging social media technologies and adapt accordingly. Ideally each page allows followers to post – particularly effective is a YouTube station that allows followers to create and post their own video, essentially campaign commercials for free. The social media environment allows prospective voters and volunteers to connect to likeminded individuals, an important solidary benefit.
- Mentorship. If campaigns want to turn new voters, donors and volunteers into long-term advocates, a system of mentorship and encouragement is necessary. Here the study of successful direct marketing firms, Amway, Tupperware, Discovery Toys, is essential. These firms have a well-honed system of mentorship that puts their most successful and proactive upline managers into an ongoing relationship with downline recruits. Shea and Burton’s (2006: 182) study of modern campaigns notes that ‘All the basic principles of new-style campaigning apply to the grassroots operation. Because the “soldiers” in the grassroots effort are generally untrained, they often need supervision.’
- Networking. Direct marketing is largely successful when new recruits tap into their existing networks. Here the solidary benefits of belonging to a party or working on a campaign are

used to advance the interests of a candidate into a cross-cutting array of groups: civic organizations, churches, volunteer or fraternal associations. Targeting prospective voters in these environments by properly trained campaign workers allows a candidate or party to buttress their messaging with a personal contact from a known and trusted source. The technology of voter identification ‘adds efficiency to what used to be a time-sensitive process’, notes Christine Pelosi (2007: 53), but ‘the science of targeting numbers will always need the art of local wisdom. Micro targeting only works with input from people on the ground, in the communities.’

## Impact on politics

Can direct marketing halt or reverse the decline of party organizations in the US? Although direct marketing is clearly an important tool in political marketing, hitherto it has not fundamentally reshaped the organizational contours of the US party system. Nevertheless, it may still do so. If direct marketing was used to its full potential it could help parties create more positive and long-lasting relationships with voters, and stimulate participation. The obstacles are high, as Whiteley (2011: 36) notes: ‘Party activism and membership have been declining across most of the democratic world.’ Of particular interest to Whiteley is the relationship of a political party to the state with a close relationship helping to weaken party activism: ‘If party organizations become denuded of volunteers, then political parties are even more likely to become wholly dependent on the state.’

Any resurgence of party membership, activism and local organizational strength will come about from an increase in local membership. Here direct marketing can have the same impact in politics as it has had in business by fostering a downline of recruits sympathetic to the goals of the larger organization who enjoy the solidary benefits of being part of a team of likeminded individuals. However, the downline has a substantial impact on its upline supervisors and bad mentorship or a structure that impedes the solidary benefits enjoyed by members can stymie efforts at party renewal. Lilleker’s work on New Labour is instructive: ‘Those who Labour were relying on for unequivocal support felt the brand was no longer for them and so rejected the product entirely’ (Lilleker 2005: 22).

A direct marketing approach that brings new recruits into the organization and continues to provide solidary benefits to more seasoned members and keeps both in a constant state of motion might be able to revive dormant organizations in support of a candidate or political party.

## The way forward

The fascinating research to conduct may lie in the significance of what happens in those energetic campaign headquarters where network marketing techniques are utilized. New voters brought into the political process by the Bush and Obama campaigns experienced a new type of politics based upon older understandings of the importance of face-to-face encounters and networking. That socialization into politics at the local level has the potential to reshape local party and campaign organizations into a continuing force for renewing the US party system. Research could also study developments such as the creation of Organizing for America, which aims to bring volunteers into helping campaign in government, not just for an election, and other initiatives in parties around the world to involve party members. A useful next step is to figure out what happened to the new recruits into these organizations, to determine whether the experience with a formal direct marketing style of campaign had the long-term effect of keeping them politically active and responsive to party organizations and party politics.

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